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Chairman: Mr. Chowdhury ..... (Bangladesh)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 114: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations (*continued*)

Agenda item 153: Human resources management (*continued*)

Agenda item 157: United Nations reform: measures and proposals (*continued*) (A/52/488)

1. **Ms. Salim** (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management) said that, as indicated in the introduction to the Secretary-General's report (A/52/488), the proposed United Nations Code of Conduct was actually a new version of article I of the United Nations Staff Regulations and of chapter I of the Staff Rules, and was therefore not intended for direct use by the specialized agencies of the common system. However, the 1954 report of the International Civil Service Advisory Board (A/52/488, annex III) setting forth the ethical and philosophical underpinnings of the international civil service, applied to the entire common system, and any revisions to it would require consultation within the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC). It should be noted that the core values of the common system were the same even though rules and procedures varied between organizations. The promulgation of a Code of Conduct containing mandatory ethical imperatives had been announced in 1994 (A/C.5/49/1, para. 31). In addition, separate codes for the Secretary-General and for officials and experts on mission would be issued shortly. The draft Code was the result of extensive staff-management consultations during which numerous changes had been introduced into earlier drafts.

2. After outlining the four-part structure of the proposed Code, she enumerated the major proposed changes to the existing Staff Regulations and Rules. The new provisions concerned the core values of the international civil service, including respect for the principles of the Charter; accountability of staff, particularly managers; prevention of conflicts of interest; financial disclosure requirements applicable to the most senior staff members; a prohibition on the use of office for personal gain; the Secretary-General's obligation to seek to ensure the safety and security of staff; the staff's freedom of opinion and belief; the Secretary-General's duty to provide training and staff development opportunities; and the Secretary-General's duty to strive for conditions of service that would attract staff of the highest calibre.

3. **The Chairman** invited the President of the Coordinating Committee for International Staff Unions and Associations of the United Nations System (CCISUA) and the representative of the Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations (FICSA) to make statements to the Committee.

4. **Ms. Waters** (President of the Coordinating Committee for International Staff Unions and Associations of the United Nations System) said that universally recognized norms and principles concerning the rights and responsibilities of staff and management should be fully integrated into the proposed Code of Conduct. Due process rights must be respected, managers must be held fully accountable for the way in which they discharged their duties and staff representatives must enjoy the freedom and effective protection they needed to carry out their mandates. Those recommendations were very much in line with the views of the Fifth Committee, as expressed in General Assembly resolution 51/226, part II, paragraphs 2 and 3. The sanctions envisaged in those paragraphs would send managers a clearer and stronger message about responsibility and appropriate behaviour than would the Code of Conduct. Before taking any decisions on the proposed Code, the Fifth Committee should seek the advice of the Sixth Committee.

5. Paragraph 12 of part II of General Assembly resolution 51/226 limited the period of continuous release of elected staff representatives to four years. However, staff representatives needed time to develop substantive and leadership skills, and term limitations could jeopardize the institutional memory of staff unions. She asked the Committee to allow the staff to determine, through their voting patterns, the terms of their elected representatives.

6. Regarding the operational independence and administrative systems of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), its staff should be subject to the same human resources management processes, particularly in respect of placement and promotion, as all other United Nations staff members. She hoped that the Fifth Committee would clarify that issue in a future resolution.

7. With respect to the achievement of savings through the reduction of non-programme costs, such savings should not affect the mandates of existing viable programmes, and both staff and management in the departments concerned should be consulted as to what constituted programme and non-programme activities.

8. The Organization's increased use of consultants, 2,500 of whom were currently working in the Secretariat, was of great concern to staff. The number of consultants hired should be minimized and the work they performed should

not involve any core elements. Another issue of concern was that of career appointments, which were essential for the creation of an independent international civil service. The prevailing atmosphere of uncertainty resulted in serious difficulties for international staff and in widespread abuse of power by managers, particularly with respect to General Service staff. She was also concerned about the decision to provide staffing tables to staff representatives only under certain conditions, since such information was essential to the performance of their work. Staff representatives were offended by the measure.

9. The purpose of the opinion poll on official holidays which the United Nations Staff Union had held earlier in 1998 had been not to question the authority of the Fifth Committee, but only to consult the staff with regard to the additional options approved by the General Assembly. There was still some tension among the staff on the issue, but the Fifth Committee could easily resolve the matter by approving one additional official holiday per year. Since the comparator Government granted 10.25 holidays per year, 10 holidays for United Nations staff would be completely in line with the Noblemaire and Flemming principles.

10. **Ms. Puhlmann** (Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations) said that the most appropriate way to ensure that international civil servants upheld the principles of the United Nations was to take an integrated approach that balanced the responsibilities of staff and the obligations of the employing organizations. Unfortunately, however, the proposed Code of Conduct used strong, mandatory terms in relation to staff and weaker language in relation to management. Moreover, it relied heavily on statements of rules, while ignoring the complexity of the ethical issues involved. It was doubtful whether the proposals would achieve the aim of promoting ethical conduct.

11. The United Nations had developed the proposed Code without consulting other agencies of the common system, yet it was very important that the specialized agencies should be consulted prior to the Code's adoption by the General Assembly. Such consultation was required under article 9 of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) statute and the agreements concluded between the United Nations and the other organizations, and there was clear precedent.

12. The proposed Code of Conduct should provide for better protection of the rights of staff representatives. Draft staff regulations 1.2 (e) and (f), if interpreted strictly, would violate the right to association and representation, including the right to demonstrate. Staff representatives must enjoy internationally recognized labour rights, particularly freedom of action, expression and criticism. Draft staff regulation 1.2 (g) should be extended to protect against discrimination after the expiration of a staff representative's term of office. Draft staff rule 101.2 (e) violated the right to demonstrate and the right to strike, as recognized by administrative tribunals of the United Nations common system. Draft staff rules 101.2 (h) and (p) could prevent staff representatives from entering into direct discussions with representatives of Member States, a practice of acknowledged value, or from addressing the media directly, for example, to explain the purpose of staff action. The Code must not become an instrument for limiting the activities of staff representatives.

13. Draft staff regulation 1.2 (o) on financial disclosure contravened the basic right to privacy, while draft staff regulation 1.3 (b) continued the existing violation of the right to reasonable working hours under international labour law. Prior to its adoption by the General Assembly, the proposed Code of Conduct should be submitted to the Sixth Committee and to the specialized agencies for comment, to ensure full respect both for consultation procedures in the United Nations system and for the international labour standards and rights set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and ILO conventions.

14. **Mr. Atiyanto** (Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, reiterated the importance which his delegation attached to the proposed Code of Conduct and the need for the Fifth Committee to review the Secretary-General's report (A/52/488) thoroughly in order to reach a judicious decision.

15. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan) noted that many of the provisions of the proposed Code of Conduct were an integral part of the Staff Regulations and Rules. The new elements might contribute to a qualitative change in the conduct and performance of staff, by clearly setting out their rights and obligations and by ensuring greater accountability. The major changes proposed would be in the interest of the staff and the United Nations, allowing the Organization to work in a more efficient manner.

16. His delegation was pleased to note that staff members generally met the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity set forth in the Charter. The Staff Regulations and Rules should preserve a balance between the rights and privileges of staff and their obligations and accountability. Only such a balance could deter those few in the Organization who engaged in practices that earned a bad name for the other staff members who worked diligently and with integrity.

17. Pakistan looked forward to the Secretary-General's proposals concerning the activities of particular occupational categories of staff which might require special rules. It was also necessary to further elaborate the concept of managerial accountability where the Organization suffered losses through the negligence of its staff. He hoped that, after the adoption of the proposed Code of Conduct, that issue would receive priority.

18. Lastly, Pakistan believed that the genuine and legitimate concerns of staff representatives needed to be addressed so that staff could also welcome the revised Code and not feel that it was being imposed on them.

19. **Ms. Powles** (New Zealand) said that it was entirely appropriate that United Nations staff should abide by a code of conduct, which should be an integral part of the Staff Regulations and Rules. The requirement that all staff members should uphold high standards of integrity, conduct and concern for the public interest was consistent with expectations in most systems of national and international civil services. Furthermore, a code of conduct was intended to protect staff from accusations of impropriety, rather than to impugn them unfairly, as had been suggested by some.

20. The public interest served by United Nations staff members was the world community of 185 Member States, which expected United Nations staff to be model international civil servants. The United Nations Code of Conduct should therefore represent the highest standards of civil service performance in the world.

21. The divergent views expressed on the proposed Code were not unexpected. It had been argued that the Code might infringe the human rights of staff members. A code of conduct, however, was about ethical standards, and to speak about human rights in relation to the proposed Code was to confuse the issue. If it had been a human rights issue, her Government would have been highly concerned and would not have advocated any code of conduct.

22. Her delegation found no hidden agenda behind the proposed Code, which was merely a set of guidelines for responsible behaviour. It was misleading and irresponsible to suggest that there was anything more to the exercise. A code of conduct was a sound basis for good management and part of the reforms needed by the United Nations, and the proposals contained nothing inappropriate.

23. Details of the proposed Code were a matter entirely between the management of the Organization and its staff. Her delegation was firmly opposed to the proposal that the proposed Code should be referred for consideration to the Sixth Committee, which was concerned with issues of international law and not internal staff matters. Sending the proposed Code to the Sixth Committee, moreover, would delay its consideration, deliberately confuse the issue of management with extraneous issues and ultimately delay the move to greater accountability in the United Nations. Should the legality of the proposed Code be of concern to the Committee, a representative of the Office of Legal Affairs might be invited to discuss any concerns which delegations might have.

24. While, in order to be effective, a code of conduct must reflect the obligations of both employers and their employees, it could not be the vehicle for every single concern of management and staff. Her delegation noted the level of consultation that had taken place since February 1997 and wished to suggest that staff representatives should use informal channels of communication to express any additional concerns which they might still have. Instead of needlessly politicizing the issue, that would be a constructive way to proceed while assuaging staff concerns.

25. Finally, she wished to draw attention to Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter, which stated that the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity were the paramount consideration in the employment of the staff of the United Nations. The proposed Code of Conduct was an elaboration on the principle of integrity and thus entirely consistent with the Charter.

26. **Mr. Bond** (United States of America) said that his delegation supported the proposed Code of Conduct, which improved upon the International Civil Service Advisory Board's *Report on Standards of Conduct in the International Civil Service 1954*. The proposed Code balanced the rights and duties of staff and their representatives and enumerated the core values of the international civil service. Significantly, it also included provisions to prevent conflicts of interest with reference to staff members and profit-making businesses, required financial disclosure statements for senior officials and explicitly addressed the question of managerial accountability.

27. As a host country, the United States warmly welcomed the requirement for staff members to comply with local laws and to honour their private legal obligations, including, but not limited to, their obligation to honour the orders of competent courts. The issue of spousal and child support was of interest to many Member States, but was of particular interest to the United States because many of the decrees for support emanated from legal action begun in the United States and affected children and spouses living there.

28. His delegation saw the Code of Conduct as a serious step forward by the Secretary-General and hoped that the Fifth Committee would approve it.

29. **Mr. Darwish** (Egypt) said that his delegation supported the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The report of the Secretary-General on a proposed United Nations Code of Conduct constituted an important step towards improving the effectiveness of United Nations administrative and financial performance. The proposed Code should complement rather than conflict with the regulations and rules governing the rights and duties of United Nations staff. His delegation stressed its appreciation of the endeavours of United Nations staff, and was aware of the dangers to which they were exposed, in particular when on field missions. He thanked them for their laudable efforts, compelled as they currently were to work in harsh conditions. If any impropriety had in fact taken place, it was extremely limited in extent. He expressed his delegation's conviction that the proposed Code should not in any way be considered as curtailing the freedom of staff members or any of their privileges. The proposals provided precise guidelines on rights and duties, and made good the current lacunae in the administrative and legal system governing rules of employment, previously noted in the reports of United Nations oversight bodies.

30. His delegation would do its utmost to become acquainted with the true concerns of United Nations staff members and would seek further clarification in informal consultations, taking into consideration the concerns expressed by the staff through their representatives and in the course of contacts made by his delegation. In conclusion, he expressed his support for the position adopted by the representative of New Zealand with regard to the Fifth Committee being the appropriate body to deal with such issues.

31. **Mr. Farid** (Saudi Arabia) welcomed the proposed Code of Conduct, which covered a wide range of human resources issues. On the question of the official holidays of the United Nations, Saudi Arabia would support a proposal to increase the total number of official holidays in each calendar year to 10. However, the General Assembly had already decided in its resolution 52/214 A that the two holidays of Id al-Fitr and Id al-Adha should be observed as official holidays of the United Nations. He therefore fully expected the resolution to be strictly implemented and 7 April, the holiday of Id al-Adha, to be a mandatory holiday for all staff of the Organization.

32. **Ms. Achouri** (Tunisia) said that her Government supported all measures aimed at ensuring that United Nations staff met the highest standards of integrity. The most important concern for Member States as employers was to enhance the staff's efficiency, output and productivity, thereby enabling them to more effectively implement the mandates of Member States. Another major concern was the strengthening of accountability. If those two requirements were to be met, staff must have an environment that was conducive to better performance. There was a feeling of uncertainty among the staff of the Organization. The reduction in posts and other effects of the reform programme together with the recourse to consultants and gratis personnel had affected morale. While the requirement for staff to be available to the Secretary-General 24 hours a day might be acceptable in emergency situations, the systematization of the practice to justify staff cuts was quite another matter. Her delegation agreed with the representative of Pakistan on the need for a fair balance between the rights and obligations of staff members. The International Civil Service Commission should be consulted on the proposed Code, even if the latter was not to be used system wide.

33. Finally, she would welcome clarification from the Under-Secretary-General for Management as to whether the provisions of the proposed Code were already being applied even before the Code had been adopted by the General Assembly, as the reply to a previous question by the representative of the Russian Federation would seem to indicate.

34. **Mr. Thorne** (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the European Union, noted that the proposed Code had been the result of extensive consultations with the staff. The European Union would have preferred its elaboration to have remained solely within the purview of the Secretary-General, but changes to the Staff Regulations and Rules were management issues that were properly dealt with by the Fifth Committee. While the proposed Code should not be referred to the Sixth Committee, informed legal advice could be sought in respect of any contradictions with existing rules. Finally, even though the Under-Secretary-General for Management had indicated that the proposed Code would not directly apply to the specialized agencies, the Committee might still benefit from hearing the views of ICSC.

35. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation was proud of the staff of the United Nations, and had supported the proposal made three years earlier by the International Civil Service Commission to increase salaries by 9 per cent. However, with regard to the Islamic holidays, he was concerned that the Staff Union had conducted a poll of staff members in order to select official holidays, and

asked who had been responsible for the decision to carry out that poll, which reflected the Staff Union's lack of understanding of the resolution adopted on the question by the Fifth Committee. He expressed his support for the position adopted by Saudi Arabia on the issue.

36. The Code of Conduct proposed by the Secretary-General was excellent in principle, but contained some elements that should be discussed. He proposed that the Code should be referred to the International Civil Service Commission and the Advisory Committee. He queried the value of holding full consultations with staff members on the issue. He expressed his support for the statement made by the representative of New Zealand on the need for the Fifth Committee to deal with the question, it being a purely administrative matter.

37. **Mr. Hanson-Hall** (Ghana) said that the staff were the backbone of the Organization and deserved to be commended for their contribution to its work. The proposed Code of Conduct was intended to provide guidance to the staff in the discharge of their duties and, as such, should benefit from meaningful consultations between all concerned parties. The proposals should be carefully considered by the Fifth Committee, as the competent body to review them. His delegation agreed, however, that it might also be useful to consult ICSC.

38. **Mr. Hanson** (Canada) said, given the diversity of nationalities, cultures and legal systems represented in the Secretariat, it could not be assumed that all staff members, upon their recruitment, would be automatically aware of the standards of conduct that were expected of them. That was why a code of conduct was so necessary.

39. His own employer, the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, had its code of conduct, whose observance was a condition of employment and breach of which might be grounds for dismissal or even criminal charges. In fact, the severity of some of the code's provisions might surprise the staff representatives who had been invited to address the Committee.

40. The proposed Code of Conduct was an issue of human resources management and therefore came within the purview of the Fifth Committee. He did not support the proposal that it should be referred to the Sixth Committee, which was mainly concerned with the codification of international law. On the other hand, he would have no objection if ICSC, the Advisory Committee or the Office of Legal Affairs were to be consulted. He hoped that the Committee would not attempt to reopen the discussion on the provisions of the proposed Code.

41. **Mr. Monayair** (Kuwait) said that his delegation would follow the issue of the proposed Code with great interest in informal consultations. He expressed his support for the statement made by the Chairman of the Group of 77 and China, and said that his own delegation's position was similar. The issue dealt with by the proposal was essentially one of concern to the Office of Human Resources Management, and therefore to the Fifth Committee. If there was a need for legal advice, the International Civil Service Commission could be consulted.

42. **Ms. Bravo Silot** (Cuba) said that the representatives of the staff had introduced another dimension into the Committee's consideration of the item and that their views should therefore be taken into account, particularly since the proposed Code of Conduct raised issues that affected the staff. She would welcome clarification from the Secretariat of the current status of the Code and of whether it would be applicable to the staff of other United Nations organizations.

43. **Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo** (Uganda) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and supported the remarks that had been made by the representatives of Canada, New Zealand and Pakistan. The proposed Code of Conduct was essentially another version of the Staff Regulations and Rules, but it seemed to his delegation that it contained too many rights and not enough obligations. It was vital to implement a strict code in order to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness in the work of the Organization.

44. His delegation was sympathetic to the concerns raised by CCISUA, and agreed that the term limitation of staff representatives was a matter for the staff. On the question of the Islamic holidays and the staff poll he wished to know whether it was normal for General Assembly resolutions to be subject to staff polls.

45. The purpose of a code of conduct was to ensure order, efficiency and stability in the functioning of the Organization. In that connection, his delegation did not believe that a provision requiring staff members to declare their assets constituted an infringement of their human rights. Staff demonstrations, if permitted, should be orderly. The smooth running of the Organization might be compromised if staff members were allowed to give interviews to the media. All matters relating to the proposed Code of Conduct fell squarely within the competence of the Fifth Committee.

46. **Ms. Salim** (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management) said that the draft Code of Conduct would not be applied until it had been reviewed and

approved by the Fifth Committee and the General Assembly. Whenever the Secretariat referred to the draft Code, it did so as a future blueprint for increased accountability throughout the Organization.

47. **Ms. Waters** (President of the Coordinating Committee for International Staff Unions and Associations of the United Nations System) said that the attitude of the staff towards the Islamic holidays seemed to have been misunderstood by delegations. There had been some confusion about the way in which the resolution had evolved. The staff had originally thought that they could choose which of the nine official holidays they wished to take. Accordingly, management had requested CCISUA to hold a poll to determine staff preferences. The poll had been delayed and, in the meantime, the General Assembly had reached a definitive conclusion on the matter. The staff had never intended to question the General Assembly's right to take decisions, and the results of the poll had been circulated for information purposes only.

48. **Mr. Da Silva Durâo** (General Secretary of the Federation of International Civil Servants Associations) said that since staff members were the chief asset of the Organization, they trusted that their concerns would be taken into account in Member States' deliberations.

49. **Mr. Monayair** (Kuwait) said that he hoped that the Secretariat would respond at that or the next meeting to the questions raised by his own and other delegations at the previous meeting with respect to the Office of Human Resources Management.

Agenda item 119: Pattern of conferences (*continued*) (A/52/829)

50. **Mr. Sach** (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on measures to ensure the necessary resources for the upgrading of conference rooms and interpretation booths (A/52/829), said that the report had been prepared in response to the need to improve the technical and audio quality of some conference facilities. Although the construction needs of the Organization had been extensively debated at the main part of the session, with the result that substantially increased resources had been made available in the biennium 1998-1999, including provision for the ongoing refurbishment of conference rooms, the Secretariat had not interpreted resolution 52/214 B as an invitation to submit revised estimates with a view to allocating even more resources for that purpose.

51. **Ms. Goicochea Estenoz** (Cuba) said that her delegation was concerned that the political consensus embodied in paragraph 26 of resolution 52/214 B had been ignored by the Secretariat. During the informal consultations leading up to the adoption of that resolution, the Secretariat had quantified the amount which it intended to spend on refurbishing conference facilities. Paragraph 26 had been adopted on the understanding that proposals would be submitted at the first part of the resumed fifty-second session to ensure all necessary resources for the upgrading of conference rooms and interpretation booths. Her delegation believed that the General Assembly's intention had been completely different from that outlined by the Director of the Programme Planning and Budget Division. The Secretary-General's report and the accompanying oral introduction set an unfortunate precedent and could therefore not be used as a basis for further deliberations.

52. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the report of the Secretary-General on the upgrading of conference rooms and interpretation booths (A/52/829) had not met the expectations of his delegation with regard to the request by the General Assembly in paragraph 26 of its resolution 52/214 B. The proposal to defer upgrading to future years was not a solution to the problem. He expected that the matter would receive the attention both of Member States and the Secretariat.

53. There had been delays in the issuance of some documents, such as the summary records of the Fifth Committee and the decisions the Committee had taken at the main part of the session. He could see no justification for delaying their official issuance beyond the beginning of the first part of the resumed session.

54. The documents of the Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, which had been held in January 1998, had been issued in only three languages, namely English, French and Spanish. The Secretariat should translate all the documents of the most recent Conference and of the next one into all six official languages in order to uphold the rule of the equality of those languages and in view of the fact that the subject matter of the Conference was inseparable from the language issue, language being the material and substance of geographical names.

55. He asked what were the new categories of fee-paying users to which reference was made in the report of the Secretary-General on access to the optical disk system (A/52/803). The Secretariat would have been better advised to have adopted a single classification for the developing and least developed countries in granting discounts for the use of the system. Scientific research centres and universities

should be granted access to the system either without charge or for a nominal fee.

56. There was a problem with the inconsistency of the English and French texts of press releases on the same subject as well as with variation in the numbering of the releases themselves. A process of revision should be established in order to reconcile the texts. His delegation had requested that press releases should be prepared in the language of the speaker and not on the basis of interpretation. A specific response should be provided on that matter.

57. In information circular ST/IC/1998/10 of 22 January 1998 the Secretariat had explicitly violated General Assembly resolution 52/214 A in deciding that the United Nations buildings would remain open on Id al-Adha, which it had made an optional holiday. The aim of the resolution had not been to segregate staff members by holiday but to have the occasion celebrated by everyone, given that the Organization was of an international and unified character. He asked the Secretariat to respond.

58. **Ms. Goicochea Estenoz** (Cuba) said that the Secretariat should explain why document A/52/829, which was only five paragraphs long, had been issued late. In addition, her delegation wished to receive confirmation that a figure of $900,000 had been mentioned by the Secretariat in the informal consultations leading up to the adoption of resolution 52/214 in connection with the cost of refurbishing conference facilities. It might still be possible for the Committee to take a decision on the matter using resources from the contingency fund.

59. **Mr. Moktefi** (Algeria) said that his delegation shared the concerns of the representative of Cuba regarding the upgrading of conference facilities, as well as those raised by other delegations regarding Islamic holidays.

60. **Mr. Elmontasser** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that his delegation was not satisfied with the content of the Secretary-General's report (A/52/829), introduced by the Director of the Programme Planning and Budget Division, although there had been some slight improvement in the situation. His delegation continued to deplore the fact that General Assembly resolution 52/214 had not been fully implemented, especially with respect to the matters mentioned by the representatives of Cuba, Algeria and the Syrian Arab Republic, including in particular paragraph 26 of the resolution concerning the upgrading of audio quality and interpretation booths, and the issues of the translation of documents into all languages and the optical disk system. Referring to the implementation of paragraphs 5 and 6 of the resolution, on religious holidays, he said that his delegation was astonished that a matter of such importance for the Islamic world should have been turned over to the Staff Committee for implementation. He asked the Secretariat to provide adequate responses without delay, as Id al-Adha fell on 7 April 1998.

61. **Mr. Atiyanto** (Indonesia) said that, as a matter of principle, his delegation believed that all official holidays should be observed on an equal basis. His delegation had also taken note of the proposal by CCISUA that there should be 10 official holidays.

62. **Mr. Monayair** (Kuwait) noted that progress had been achieved under the item on the pattern of conferences, despite the fact that from time to time there were still appreciable delays in issuing documents. He remarked that on the occasion of the meetings of the Phase IV Working Group on Reimbursement of Contingent-owned Equipment, held from 9 to 13 February 1998, delegations had been surprised to find, on the first day, that an Arabic document had been printed in mirror image and was unreadable. That situation would have been sufficient reason to postpone the work of the Working Group if the members had insisted. He hoped that nothing of the sort would happen again, as many States relied heavily on the Arabic documentation. He expressed support for the Syrian representative's remarks on the standardization of geographical names; it was to be hoped that all due care would be exercised to eliminate errors. The paragraph of resolution 52/214 referring to holidays, for its part, was perfectly clear, and had been prepared in collaboration with the Secretary-General's representatives. Id al-Fitr and Id al-Adha were official holidays that must be treated on a footing of equality with other holidays. He emphasized that he himself, like everyone else, respected religious holidays and other holidays, and said that it was essential for the paragraph dealing with Id al-Adha to be implemented.

63. **Mr. Farid** (Saudi Arabia) said that the issue of Islamic holidays had been negotiated in great detail with the Assistant Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services. His delegation had therefore hoped that the Secretariat would have been able to implement resolution 52/214 B in full. The Islamic holidays should be official holidays; staff members should not work on those days and should receive full pay.

64. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic) referred to the representative of Kuwait's remarks about the meetings on contingent-owned equipment and said that his delegation found the latter's description of the unfortunate presentation of an Arabic document most distressing. While his delegation had not attended the meetings in question, had

it done so it would certainly have asked for a suspension of the proceedings until such time as the document could have been issued in suitable form. Such a situation was not to be tolerated.

65. **Mr. Ahounou** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that he supported the statements made by the representatives of Algeria and Cuba in connection with the report on the upgrading of conference rooms and interpretation booths (A/52/829). General Assembly resolution 52/214 should be fully implemented, and official holidays should be observed without discrimination. He asked whether the General Assembly or the Secretariat determined the number of holidays.

66. His delegation wished action to be taken to prevent any recurrence of the situation which had occurred at the most recent session of the Commission on the Status of Women, at which documents had been available only in English. If the cause was a lack of resources, the Committee should be told, so that efforts could be made to resolve the problem.

67. **Ms. Fahmy** (Egypt) said that she would focus on the report contained in document A/52/829. Her delegation was distressed that the relevant General Assembly resolution had not been adequately implemented. It appeared from paragraph 5 of the report that certain conference rooms remained to be upgraded, and that there was no current provision in the programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 for such outstanding work. As there was no indication that additional resources would be available in the near future, she wondered how the Secretariat could regard the implementation of the resolution as feasible. The fact that the Secretariat was engaged in informal consultations was a matter of some importance. She was surprised that the Secretariat was having such difficulty in implementing the resolution. Her delegation was encountering interpretation problems because of the current condition of the booths, and would have further comments when given an opportunity to speak on other questions relating to the pattern of conferences.

68. **Mr. Sach** (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division) said that the cost of refurbishment of Conference Rooms 4 and 5 and all interpretation booths was estimated at $1.3 million, as indicated in the Secretary-General's report (A/52/829, para. 2). The earlier estimate of approximately $900,000 had been provided at the main part of the session before consultation with the Facilities Management Division. Should the Committee wish to make use of the procedure provided for under General Assembly resolution 41/213 on the use of the contingency fund, it seemed that there might still be political difficulties, as had been the case in December 1997. For that reason, his Division had not issued revised estimates, believing it not to be the consensus wish of Member States.

69. He regretted the fact that the report had been issued after the start of the first part of the resumed session, but a certain amount of technical consultation had been required to arrive at the cost estimate. He trusted that the Committee would still be able to reach a satisfactory conclusion with regard to paragraph 26 of Assembly resolution 52/214. As indicated in the report, the resources would be included in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001, unless other channels could be explored, since it was the Division's conclusion, after careful scrutiny, that it would not be possible to find funds in the current biennium, owing to the high priority of other maintenance and construction projects, many of which had been deferred from earlier bienniums.

70. **Mr. Riesco** (Assistant Secretary-General, Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services) said that he regretted the issuance of an illegible document in Arabic, but noted that some 20,000 documents were produced every year, and there were occasional errors. That said, he welcomed the fact that the error had been drawn to his attention, and every effort would be made to avoid recurrences. Regarding the documentation for the Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, it was his understanding that the Conference had taken a decision on its working languages, based on its pattern of use of languages, and it would be for the Conference to make any change in that regard. He would provide further detail later.

71. The issue of official holidays was of vital importance to the calendar of conferences and the programme of meetings. Nevertheless, the issue clearly transcended the responsibilities of his Department.

72. Documentation for the Commission on the Status of Women was issued in all six official languages, in which connection the comment by the representative of Côte d'Ivoire might refer to informal papers. He would welcome clarification of the difficulty, so as to prevent recurrences.

73. **Ms. Goicochea Estenoz** (Cuba) said that the statement by the Director of the Programme Planning and Budget Division was unacceptable since the Secretariat could not be guided by political considerations in making proposals, which must be based on technical considerations alone. She was also concerned by the Secretariat's interpretation of General Assembly resolution 41/213 on the use of the contingency fund, and the procedure followed by the Secretariat. The matter would need to be debated further.

74. **Mr. Medina** (Morocco) said that his delegation supported other delegations with regard to the implementation of paragraph 6 of resolution 52/214 A. The matter of the two holidays should be accorded the importance it deserved. His delegation wished to know whether documents were checked before being issued, because an Arabic document had been issued in mirror image. It also wished to know whether or not the report of the Phase IV Working Group on Reimbursement of Contingent-owned Equipment had been issued in all languages, because more than a month had elapsed and it had received only the English version. His delegation was still awaiting a reply from the Secretariat before it could comment on the documents of the Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

75. **Mr. Farid** (Saudi Arabia) said that he was not satisfied by the response by the Assistant Secretary-General regarding Id al-Fitr and Id al-Adha. Official holidays meant that buildings were closed and staff had the day off on full pay. He enquired as to the status of the report on the cost-accounting system, to be submitted to the Committee by 31 July. His delegation had previously asked for details of the staff transferred to and from the support account, as well as how many posts held by nationals of developing countries were to be abolished, and would welcome responses as quickly as possible.

76. **Ms. Fahmy** (Egypt) referring to the question of Arabic documentation for the Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names and the Working Group on Contingent-owned Equipment, said that her delegation full appreciated the statement made in that connection by the Assistant Secretary-General to the effect that the volume of work was very great. Her delegation had nevertheless noted repeated incompetence in the work done on documents issued in the Arabic language. At the beginning of the fifty-second session there had also been a complaint, of which representatives in the Fifth Committee had taken note, concerning the low quality of the printing of reports in Arabic relating to one of the oversight bodies. She was confident that the Assistant Secretary-General would issue instructions to prevent that in the future. She supported the views of the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic with regard to the use of the optical disk system. The Secretariat must take account of two categories; that of the developing countries in general and that of other countries. There was nevertheless no objection to there being three categories – the developing countries, the least developed countries and other countries – provided that account was taken of the developing countries, which represented a majority of the Members of the Organization.

77. At its most recent meeting at Headquarters, the Commission on the Status of Women had been forced to vote on a resolution without interpretation and it had also concluded its official meetings and consultations without interpretation. That fact would be included in the report of the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women. There should be greater coordination within the Secretariat, and the holding of an official Economic and Social Council meeting without interpretation was inexcusable.

78. It was absurd that countries should be obliged to engage in haggling on the question of holidays. It had now become necessary to obtain a clear response from the Secretariat and to know which particular Secretariat office was to implement the relevant General Assembly resolution. It was appropriate for the Secretariat to provide a written response concerning its interpretation of the resolution. Then, perhaps, it would be for the Committee to take other measures or to adopt another resolution. The delegation of Egypt had still had no clear explanation of the Secretariat's confusion with regard to the implementation of the resolution. In one of its bulletins the Secretariat had announced that Id al-Fitr and Id al-Adha were not official holidays. Then the delegations of certain countries had intervened with the Secretariat and another bulletin had been issued saying that only one of them would be an official holiday. That was not acceptable, because the resolution had been adopted in the official languages of theSecretariat and there was no reason for any ambiguity. The Secretariat must respond on those questions.

79. **Mr. Thorne** (United Kingdom) said that the European Union was conscious of the great importance attached by many delegations to the issue of official holidays and the efforts already made by the Secretariat to address those concerns. On the issue of conference rooms, it might be productive to discuss the matter in informal consultations.

80. **Mr. Lozinsky** (Russian Federation) recalled that the consultations leading to the adoption of General Assembly resolution 52/214 had been very difficult, a point which should be borne in mind by all delegations. It might be useful for those delegations which had forgotten that fact to consult the relevant summary records, which could be distributed for that purpose.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.